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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2845
INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 0428
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 6598
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 1775
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ MAR LIMA 3325
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 2803
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA 8834
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 3961
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 1961
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL 3479
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUMIAAA/USCINCSO MIAMI FL
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 002029

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SUBJECT: WEEKLY ELECTION ROUNDUP - FEBRUARY 28 - MARCH 6

REF: BOGOTA 1965

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR JEFFREY DELAURENTIS;
REASONS 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (U) Election updates for February 28 - March 6.

¶2. (U) ELN To Cease Hostilities During Congressional Elections: Per reftel, On March 2, National Liberation Army (ELN) military commander Antonio Garcia announced the guerrilla group would "not carry out any military action to the detriment of the March 12 electoral events." Speaking from Cuba, Garcia said that the cessation of hostilities would start several hours before the commencement of elections and last until several hours after they concluded. President Uribe called the announcement "a good contribution to the nation" and said the gesture was one that would "help the peace-building process." The ELN has not made any announcement regarding the presidential elections in May.

¶3. (C) U Party Handicaps the Congressional Race: In a meeting with Poloff on February 28, U Party Secretary General (#2) Jose Fernando Bautista said the Liberals would finish first in the congressional results, followed by the U Party, Cambio Radical, and the Conservatives. For Bautista, the rough Senate breakdown would be as follows:

Liberals (PLC): 25
U Party (U): 18-20
Cambio Radical (CR): 15-16
Conservatives (PCC): 10-12
Polo Democratico Alternativo (PDA): 8-10
Alas Equipo Colombia (A-EC): 4-5
Colombia Viva (CV): 4-5
Enrique Penalosa party: 3

Bautista stated that the two big losers would be the Conservatives (down from almost 30 Senate seats in 2002) and Antanas Mockus, who is almost non-existent in U Party polling. He predicted the biggest overall voter getter would be German Vargas Lleras (CR), followed closely by Gina Parody (U) and Gustavo Petro (PDA).

14. (C) U Party, Part II - the President and the Congressional Elections: As per press reports, Bautista noted that Uribe would attend major events (one each day) with "his" six parties (U, CR, PCC, Penalosa, A-EC, and Colombia Democratica). At each, Bautista predicted that Uribe would generally state that he wants voters to vote for pro-Uribe congressional candidates, but he will not take sides for one pro-Uribe candidate over another. Finally Bautista stated that the U's congressional candidates are not mad at Uribe for not campaigning for them, as they know he is in a spot in terms of public opinion (against him campaigning, for himself or Members of Congress). In addition, they are cognizant that reelection is a first for Colombia and that Uribe needs to err on the side of caution.

15. (U) Uribe Slips a Little in Polls, but Uribista Parties Expected to Win Senate Majority: The most recent poll, released by leading daily El Tiempo on March 5, indicate that Uribe has dropped about 8 points, while likely Liberal opponent Horacio Serpa has gained about 10 points. Uribe still leads Serpa by more than 30 points. Recent polls also show that, while the Liberal Party is expected to win the largest number of seats in the Senate, the six Uribista parties will form a majority coalition (septel).

16. (SBU) Barranquilla is Uribe Country: On a private trip to Barranquilla, Poloff noticed proportionally far greater campaign materials (posters and billboards) than in Bogota. (Note: This is also true in Cali. National guidelines regulate the amount of campaign materials candidates receive, but each city determines where they can be placed.) The vast majority of ads favored the pro-Uribe party candidates. Informal polling of locals (hotel staff, store clerks, taxi drivers) revealed strong support for Uribe himself but relative disdain for Congressional candidates in general. Those questioned overwhelming pointed to two factors in support of Uribe: improvements in public security and infrastructure money for Barranquilla, Colombia's fourth largest city.

17. (U) Uribe Orders Mobilization of All Public Forces in Advance of Elections: President Uribe has called upon all members of the Public Forces to "take to the field." Personnel assigned to administrative tasks or in training have been ordered to "go out and reinforce security measures in order to guarantee calm in the upcoming elections." National Police (CNP) Director Jorge Daniel Castro echoed the call, confirming that no one single police officer would remain in an office and not one trainee at the academies during the March 12 congressional elections.

18. (U) Voting Ink Stains Won't Be Death Sentences: Interior and Justice Minister Sabas Pretelt announced that the practice of marking voters' fingers with indelible ink - to prevent repeat voting - will not be obligatory in areas where the FARC has threatened to kill residents who go to the polls. This decision comes on the heels of a FARC order to its fighters making "military objectives" of all vehicles, public and private, transiting roads in parts of Southern Colombia in an effort to derail the elections.

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